

***FASHION  
IN DENIAL  
- A CRITICAL  
FASHION  
PRACTICE  
TO GENDER  
EQUALITY***

***by***

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"FASHION IN DENIAL"  
- A CRITICAL FASHION PRACTICE TO  
GENDER EQUALITY

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## Master's of Art Thesis Abstract

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This thesis is a critical fashion practice, which aims to tackle the restrictions and oppressions caused by the binary logic of gender in contemporary fashion industry by offering a possible alternative sitting outside the binary system. The binary system of femininity and masculinity is established under the context of patriarchal hegemony. Thus clothing or fashion that constructs and reflects personal and gender identities with the binary mindset of gender perpetuates gender inequality in the society. Similarly, gendered fashion or clothing fails to construct and express personal identities, inasmuch as personal identities in contemporary society are malleable and unable to be defined within two categories. This requires the alternatives of fashion and clothing transcending the binary logic of gender. The research of the thesis also elaborates that the gender border crossings in fashion function as reconfiguration and conformation rather than transcendence to the binary gendered fashion due to the evidences of the dominance of male principles observed in these attempts.

In my opinion, a possible solution to this issue is to introduce the practice of genderless fashion which denies the visual signifiers of gender rather than mixing together signifiers from each category of the binary system of gender used in gender border crossings.

The method for approaching the solution in this thesis is to distort the visual signifiers of gender on the selection of unisex wardrobe items through my critical design practice. The design process conducts the method of distortion in two sections – the garment construction and the textile design. The outcomes of this experiment in the field of genderless fashion are a fashion collection of 6 outfits containing 20 clothing items. This study provides my interpretation of genderless fashion as a future alternative for fashion industry to contribute to gender equality.

### KEYWORDS

critical fashion, genderless, gender construction, clothing, design activism, critical design

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# Chapter 1

## Critical fashion

This chapter provides background knowledge of critical fashion wherein I see my fashion design practice sits. I aim to explain and answer, what is critical fashion, why critical fashion is important and necessary for the post-modern society, through what methods critical fashion could possibly benefit and make contribution to the society. In the first section, I started with the research of the origins of the word "critical", from its former history of use to the present. I furthermore analysed criticality or criticism in relatively close field of study, such as art and design. By comparing the similarity and difference of the ways how criticality exists within these fields, I provide answers to what is critical fashion. The social functions of clothing are introduced first by the second section in order to explain the naturalness of the evolvement into critical fashion. It is followed by the explanations of what had produced opportunities and demands for the emergence of critical fashion. At last, I suggested three ways I see critical fashion could make contribution to social changes and society.

## 1.1 What is critical fashion?

The word "criticism" or "critical" derives from the French word "critique", which has its roots in Latin ("criticus" - a judge, literary critic) and Greek ("kritikós" – discerning, capable of judging ). The very early meaning of criticism was mostly literary criticism until the 20th century. With the influence of wars, especially two world wars, criticism became a broader conception of voicing an objection, an expression of disapproval or an attitude of rejecting (Crowther, Dignen, & Lea, 2002, p. 178).

Art in its very nature are critical of the status quo, as Adorno augured that, "all art is an uncommitted crime." Although art has long been involved with irony and judgmental storytelling throughout the history, it was not until 19th century that art, together with literature and music, started unambiguously dipping its toes into the role of social-political responsibility and influencing popular opinions. Works from musicians and artists, such as Ludwig van Beethoven, Théodore Géricault, Francisco Goya and etc, self-consciously drew public attention to themselves, and were intended

to raise awareness and mourning for oppression and tyranny through the messages they convey (Geczy & Karaminas, 2017, p. 2).

Criticality in art or aesthetic criticism or art as social commentary is a concept that believes art can have a vital role in society, challenging orthodox understanding of the world, conducting social-political ideas and contributing to social change. Artists use their talent and vision to create artworks that reassess, provide insight to, and in some cases even protest against, societal and political issues, "including racial and gender equality, civil rights, sexual politics, cultural and social identity, and globalization" (MOCA Jacksonville, 2016).

In the early 20th century, art became largely politically engaged with the emergence of numerous varieties of activist performance art influenced by Dada, an anti-war art movement using visual, literary and sound media to express discontent with violence, war, nationalism and capitalism. Artists started to use art as a medium to express objection against inequality issues in the society. An exemplification of this is Mexican Muralists in the 1920s, which were in revolution against tyrannical industrialization through various types of art. Other examples are artists, "including Ronald Haeblerle, Peter Saul, Carl Andre, Norman Carlberg and Nancy Spero" (Martinique, 2016, para. 3), who used art to express objection to the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s (Martinique, 2016).

Coming to 21st century, art after modernism still mostly remains critical but in a way more localized and critical art appears in a larger variety of different forms. Artists not only transform artworks into a language that speaks against oppression and inequality regarding gender, race and class, but more provocatively, even protest or political "actions" as is called by Petr Pavlensky, one of the renowned member of political art who chooses extreme performance art, including nudity and self-mutilation, against chauvinism and gender inequality. However, theorists, such as T.J.Clark, Adam Geczy, Vicki Karaminas and etc, have criticised contemporary art of its close relation to capital and advertising industry and augured that it is the "end game" of art criticism. Contemporary art marks its success by the quality of accessibility and audience engagement and become a form of entertainment which is lacking critical reflection or historical justification (Geczy & Karaminas, 2017, p. 3).

"The marriage of art and knowledge appears more tenuous and arbitrary than in the modernist heyday, for now art is,..., simply reflective,..., of the knowledge of art's growing impotence due to its status of luxury pawn in the commodity game played by the oligarchic elite." (Geczy & Karaminas, 2017, p. 4)

Art opening to mass appeal has resulted in a blurred boundary between contemporary art and fashion industry, as art historian T.J.Clark (2000) asked in the writing "Modernism, postmodernism and steam", the line of demarcation between visual art and fashion industry no longer exists (Geczy & Karaminas, 2017,p. 3).

The diminishing of criticality in contemporary art and the continually thinning borderline between visual art and fashion industry provides fertile soil for commentary and criticism in fashion to grow. On the contrary to art, whose crisis of its criticality comes from the vanishing of a "critical outside" to the mainstream; fashion in its very origins is intertwined with the commodity system, even "anti-fashion" is considered to be a sub-genre of the fashion system, criticism in fashion appears within its system (Geczy & Karaminas, 2017,p. 6).

Therefore, since late 70s or early 80s, we witness a great number of fashion designers engage their talents and vision into the combination of fashion and criticality. A very early exemplification of fashion involved with criticality is Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren's collaboration on Punk style and their boutique. In fact, the emergence of punk style led by the Westwood and McLaren pair is recognised to be an important milestone in "critical fashion". Other significant figures in the following decades are Rei Kawakubo with her Japanese contemporaries, Gareth Pugh, Miuccia Prada, Aitor Throup, Viktor & Rolf, Raf Simons, Rick Owens, Walter van Beirendonck and his Belgian contemporaries, Alexander McQueen and Martin Margiela and etc (Geczy & Karaminas, 2017).

One of the key concept for to understand "critical fashion" is hermetic fashion, as fashion theorists Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas defined in their book "Critical fashion practice" that hermetic fashion is designated to describe what "critical fashion" is not. Hermetic fashion is recognised by its feature of being useful and unobtrusive. The term hermetic fashion is coined as a replacement to "class fashion", which is often associated with the connotation of hetero-normative values.

For example, the t-shirt, the suit, the black dress are all representations of hermetic fashion. Thus to some extent, "critical fashion" is sometimes obtrusive, bold and unusual and functionality is not always the priority during the process of designing.

Recognising the difference and similarity between "critical design" or visual art and "critical fashion" is as well of significance in defining "critical fashion". "Critical design" is a form of social-political oriented industrial design practice and cultural provocation that aims at raising debates and concerns of complex societal problems, including social inequality, through questioning and challenging of the orthodox applications within its design practice (Malpass, 2017). Considering an important feature of industrial design is its function of dealing with problem-solving for industrial production, it is less socially engaged as fashion that had symbolized class, gender, identity for a long history. Hence critical design is critical mostly within the system and reflects to the outside world, while critical fashion, in many cases is able to address criticism directly to the outside similarly to visual art. Namely, critical fashion does not necessarily focus on critiques of the applications and methods within fashion industry. Criticality in art nonetheless is not restricted to the service of human body, thence it appears in a variety of different forms and mediums and its expression does not always requires working in coexistence with human body like fashion. In other words, critical fashion uses both the clothing and the human body as elements in its language to make critiques.

"Critical fashion" also shares an intertwined connection with subculture style that considered being a first stage of revolution of material communication in fashion industry. Subculture style evolves into critical fashion, as it gradually adapts itself into the fashion industry from outside through its transformation into a stylistic register (Geczy & Karaminas, 2017).

In conclusion, critical fashion is a method of fashion design practice engaging social-political ideas into the design of fashion, raising awareness and discussion of social inequality, concerning gender, race and class, or protesting against persisting prejudice. Critical fashion reflects the society by deconstructing the connotation of the relationship between clothing and body or directly works as a canvas of the writing of political protests. The criticism in critical fashion present in the coexistence of clothing and human body, whether with the existence of human body in different

forms or the nonexistence of human body.

## 1.2 The necessity of critical fashion

Clothing or fashion, since its origins, as an important constituent component of culture, has been in inseparable relationship with the society (Vänskä, 2018). Clothing or fashion reflects the society through representing important information, including class, gender, occupation, ethnicity, age, race and etc, of the members of the society as well as plays a role in communicating social norms, beliefs and ideologies. Thus critical fashion is merely a newly generated variation of fashion and clothing engaging in social activities, though in a much more provocative and explicit demeanour.

Critical fashion generated in the context of post-modernity is indicative of a demand of critical fashion in postmodern society, in which the demand came from difficulties in the development of both cultural criticality and individual expression of fashion and clothing. Specifically, the former one is due to, as briefly mentioned in the previous section, the toothlessness of art criticism after modernism. Critics and theorists, such as David Geers and Mario Perniola, argue that contemporary art is lacking critical reflection and historical justification and it is as well disconnected with the reality. The commercialising of contemporary art pushed art away from knowledge, theory and observation to the outside, and turned it into flattening and reflective fantasies and clichés. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas (2017, p. 6) furthermore suggest that involvement of capitals and advertisement in art resulted in the disappearance of a "critical outside" to the mainstream. Hence it created a crisis in the development of the criticality in contemporary art, since the objective outside which is crucial for sustaining criticality in art no longer exists under postmodern society. The powerlessness of criticism in contemporary art left behind a vacuum of cultural criticism that enabled fashion more opportunities than it had before into the discourse of aesthetic criticism. Unlike art, the criticality in fashion does not always require an objective outside of itself or the mainstream, criticism has been made commonly within the fashion system where even "anti-fashion" and other critical perspectives are also included as subgenres (Geczy & Karaminas, 2017). The latter

factor contributed to the demand of critical fashion is related to the transformation of the responsibilities and social roles of fashion or clothing itself in post-modern society. On the contrary to pre-modern times when appearance and clothing were highly regulated by old hierarchical social orders and ascribed social roles, Llewellyn Negrin (2008, p. 9) argues that appearance no longer exactly indicate "attributes such as the class, occupation, or ethnicity of the wearer". This is due to the fact that individuals' social roles could not be taken for granted any more with the destruction of the previous hierarchical social orders. Accordingly, the emergence of forging a personal identity as a task for individuals in post modern society leads to the design of personal identity through the aestheticisation of one's appearance (Negrin, 2008). However, as a result of the transformation of social hierarchy, clothing and fashion had discarded most of their former meanings, and become "free-floating" signifiers which in this sense signifying nothing beyond themselves (Negrin, 2008). That is to say, the forging of one's personal identity through the fashion of the appearance with "free-floating" signifiers is fundamentally paradoxical, as the process of cultivation certain "looks" become a "visual experimentation with style for style's sake" (Negrin, 2008, p. 3). The more individuals seek to define their identity through certain "looks", the less these "looks" shows about the authentic self (Negrin, 2008). In order for the fashioning of one's appearance to demonstrate the true and authentic self, the appearance must be independent from self rather than identical with the self, and reflects the self by signifiers as vehicles for expressing one's values and beliefs (Negrin, 2008). Critical fashion as one of many alternatives carrying values and beliefs is therefore demanded in this case for breaking through the limitations of postmodern aestheticisation of the self or personal identity.

Critical fashion as a special form of cultural criticism is recognised to benefit or contribute to social changes or the society through three different roles it plays within the society. One of the roles or the functions is through the representation of social inequality and social issues. In postmodern society, the representation of social inequality through fashion and clothing is indirect and subtle, since fashion and clothing are not strictly regulated according to hierarchical social orders. In critical fashion, criticism of social inequality is demonstrated in a parodistic manner, through exaggerating or distorting the observation of the difference in clothing choices that

reflect social inequality. By drawing attention to the specific issues of social inequality, critical fashion raises awareness and as well provides necessary knowledge for the issues through a multitude of ways of presentation such as runways, installation, fashion films, exhibition, workshops, and etc. In addition to portraying the social inequality, critical fashion also works as a visual sign that brings together people sharing similar beliefs or political ideas, hence creates community devoting to bring better social solution and alternatives to the society. Clothing or fashion has always been used to recognise, sustain and confirm people's membership within or without specific communities. Exemplifications of this are clothing with various slogans printed on in a protest or social movement. Clothing in those social activities is seen as a tool to confirm the membership of the political communities and to gather people into the certain location where the social activities are organised and conducted. Values and political ideas are also installed through the presentation on the clothing both within the communities and from the communities to the outsiders. Another role fashion and clothing play to make contribution to the society is a platform for designer and other participators to directly offer alternatives or solutions to social changes. For instance, fashion design that is critical to environmental issues could offer sustainable solutions within fashion system. Other exemplifications are the various experiments designer did since the 60s in the field of gender border crossing in fashion and clothing. These experiments on gender border crossing through either mixture of presumed womenswear and menswear or styling with items from traditional women's and men's wardrobe provide new perspectives on the relationship between each gender as well as the conception of gender in clothing.

# Chapter 2

## Binary system of gender in fashion

This chapter provides answers to the two questions essential to understand the purposes and concepts of my critical fashion design practice:

1. What do I criticise in the field of fashion with my critical fashion practice?
2. Why is it important and necessary to criticise these issues in the fashion and clothing industry?

The first section in this chapter demonstrates evolvments of the persistent binary logic of gender in fashion industry from the sexual revolution in 1960s to now. It further explains although seemingly diminishing once, the binary gender system in fashion has made its returns in the recent few decades. In contrast to the continuously malleable personal identities of post-modernity, the binary system of gender in fashion stays relatively static, which results in its incompatibility with the postmodern role of fashion as the expression and forging journey of personal identities. This incompatibility therefore produces oppression and anxiety for people whose personal identities are considered or transforming outside the binary logic of gender to express themselves with fashion and clothing.

The second section analyses attempts of gender border crossing. It points out that gender border crossings are in fact reconfiguration and re-negotiation within the binary system of gender rather than transcendence of it, due to the fact that these attempts function as measurement and differentiation of masculinity and femininity. Henceforth, gender border crossing cannot be the possible solution to surpass the binary logic of gender in fashion which creates oppression and obstacles in expression of postmodern personal identities through fashion, if not, worsen the situation.

A possible solution to the incompatibility between binary gender system in fashion and continuously malleable postmodern personal identities is, as I suggest with my master's collection design, a non-gendered or genderless fashion practice which completely denies gender categories in every aspect of it.

## 2.1 Binary system of gender in fashion

Coming to the second decade of 21st century, we still constantly notice worldwide discussions like whether gender is nature or nurture. There has been an obvious visible progress made into the resolution of gender inequality issue, as we witness, in the last few decades after sexual revolution, transformation and evolvement of the discussion of gender inequality issues into a relatively more complex, wide, specific and deep level with indispensable connections to sex, gender, race and sexual orientation. It is now a topic concerning the principle of equality and civil rights of a wide range of people including heterosexual woman and man, gays, lesbians, and recently trans-people, rather than between male and female (Paoletti, 2015, p. 151). A common perspective on the discussion of whether gender is nature or nurture is to see gender as a combination of both qualities. The biological sex is a start point for the journey of gender, personal experience and environmental factors like parental influence also contribute to a person's gender identity construction (Paoletti, 2015, p. 167). Furthermore, gender identity as part of personal identity is now recognised by a large group of people, from neighbours to academic experts in the field, as an endless process, a lifetime journey of exploring and understanding ourselves. Gender identity or personal identity is therefore in instability, it constantly renews its content and meaning by adding new layers of understanding or alteration into the pre-existence, it is malleable (Negrin, 2008). Accordingly, fashion or clothing recognised as the major platform for people to express and understand their personal identities is often under transformation in the lifelong observation. The possibility of a person changing his or her fashion styles through the years of life is much higher now than it is before the sexual revolution when fashion and clothing were believed as symbols for confirming the membership of a certain social class (Crane, 2000). A person's fashion or clothing or appearance now is as well malleable and unstable alongside the instability of personal identity (Negrin, 2008).

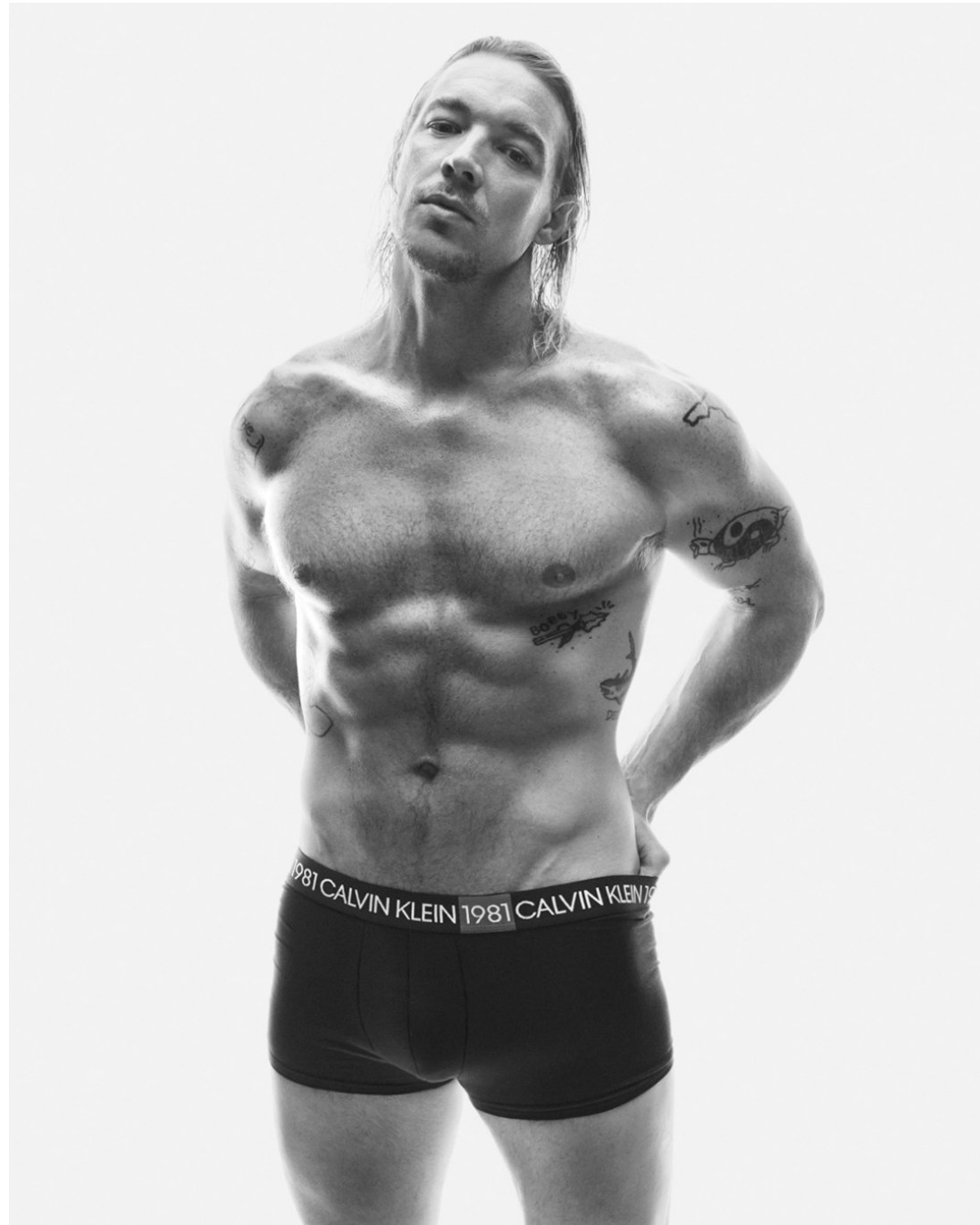
As expected to become a revolutionary explosion of a multitude of choices, gender identity or fashion or clothing nevertheless still remains, to some extent, under a binary gendered system. In fact, theorists, such as Jo B. Paoletti (2015, p. 157), claimed that statistics show a tendency of the market interests of mainstream

clothing shifting back to be more gendered after the short period of sexual revolution in the 60s – 70s, when a booming of unisex and gender-free fashion occurred with representative fashion items such as the uniforms in star trek. There has been a gradual decline of unisex options from womenswear to menswear, and surprisingly, even in children's wear, in replacement of unisex fashion in children's wear is highly gendered clothing style, such as pink dress with pastel colours and ruffles together with hair ribbons and barrettes for girls, blue outfits with trucks or football motifs for boys. This is a reflection on fashion industry of unsolved questions and issues of gender left by sexual revolution and second wave feminist movement (Paoletti, 2015).

Some people might argue that the seemingly larger media coverage of LGBTQ communities is indicative of a gender free society; however it is still comparatively a renegotiation and replacement of concepts within the binary system (Paoletti, 2015). That is, a shift from the male verses female system to the masculinity verse femininity system. The gender inequality here appears in a way that masculinity is expected in superiority over femininity. Instead of putting people into a concept package of either female or male, which including stereotyped social norms of appearance, behaviours, personality, social roles, and etc, the mode of binary system now distribute people into the concept boxes of masculinity and femininity. People who are visibly recognised to have one attribute of masculinity or femininity are also expected to possess other characteristics included in the same box. An exemplification of this is that Paoletti (2015, p. 155) found in research girls who were usually dressed in pants were considered to be more active by their peers comparing to girls dressed in skirts or dresses, even in circumstances when they were not.

A corresponding reflection of the masculinity verse femininity gender system in fashion and beauty industry is the sexualisation of femininity. In comparison to the fashion of the 1950s and early 1960s, women's' fashion today appears to be more revealing and more centralised on sexual attraction or objectification, in some senses, even for teenage girls and the younger or occasions such as the workplace (Paoletti, 2015). It is commonplace for clothing with cleavage design to be worn in classroom and office setting now instead of being mainly used in places, such as beaches and clubs, in the past. Similarly, the mostly seen length of dress and skirt is above the kneecap and for shorts is above the mid-thigh. The popularity of cropped trousers

and capris in women's fashion is indicative of the deficiency of shorts that are longer than mid-thigh. Paoletti (2015, p. 159) suggests that the implicit cultural message that women should be sexually attractive in almost every occasions and moments has caused oppressive feelings to many women, especially those who don't seen the image of themselves in the current beauty trends or standards, including the ideal concept of age, body size and etc. She further suggested that the phenomenon of early feminisation of girls is also associated and involved with the sexualisation of femininity. Children's clothing has been transforming towards a sharply gendered direction with the fewer options for gender-neutral or non-gendered styles, especially for girls. The more gendered consumer culture of children's wear for young girls prepared them for sexualisation, as the feminine children's clothing suggest a world of femininity that young girls will have to outgrow in a few years (Paoletti, 2015). It is evidenced by the blurring of size-age boundaries in girls', teens' and women's clothing. Criticisms and concerns of parents that children's clothing for girls is often overly mature occur world-widely on the internet. Another exemplification of the reflection of gendered binary system on fashion and beauty industry is the sexualisation of masculinity and the masculinisation in men's fashion and beauty trends. The advertising and media industry promoted ideal beauty standard of men is highly masculine, which could be evidenced by the almost ubiquitous Calvin Klein underwear advertisements for men. In these advertisements, masculinity is assured by the presentation of the signs of traditional masculinity. In other words, the male models in the advertisements are usually muscular, implying the sense of solidity and strength, even when they are in postures associated with the female nudity in art in order for the body to project a sinuous line. Their hairstyles are often slightly dishevelled, suggesting a sense of rough masculinity (Negrin, 2008). The sexualisation of masculinity is exemplified in gay communities as well by the popularity of highly masculine appearance and fashion style, in contrast to the association of gay communities with femininity. Muscular body is considered sexually attractive to the majority of gay community, pushing them into the gym and body shaping. At the same time, signs of femininity are usually relegated, unwelcomed, and even shamed by the gay communities, despite a large number of attempts of men appropriating women's fashion and beauty products are from gay communities. The sexualisation of femininity and masculinity in the consumer culture, promoted by the advertising



*Figure 1. Diplo for Calvin Klein Underwear (Jackson, 2019)*

and media industry, signifies and reconfirms the binary gendered system, installs binary gendered way of thinking and values into the society, even as early as in the childhood, and thus leads the development of modern fashion to the direction of more distinct difference for men's and women's clothing.

As mentioned previously that the duty of fashion and clothing in contemporary culture lies in its function for people to express their personal identities through their fashion practice of forging and studying themselves. There is a paradox between fashion and personal identity in postmodern society, because fashion and clothing industry remains and becomes more gendered in the binary system and the postmodern concept of personal identities is malleable and continuously transforming (Negrin, 2008), therefore could not be categorised within a binary system, or even a taxonomical system of finite categories (Paoletti, 2015). Thus fashion and clothing industry relatively fails in providing alternatives for its postmodern demand of expressing personal identities. Moreover, a binary gendered fashion and beauty industry creates obstacles and limitations for forging a genuine and authentic personal identity, as people who see themselves incompatible to the binary gendered system are pushed back to the system, through the sexualisation of masculinity in men and femininity in women and defining cross-gender qualities to be undesired and unattractive. Henceforth, a gendered clothing industry for children is disabled to provide a gender-nonconforming environment for them to learn about themselves in early years. The boys' and girls' influence on the market for gendered clothing in a media-rich consumer culture are sometimes mistaken as innate needs by the parents (Paoletti, 2015). Many people could not find the right and exact fashion items or styles for their individualist expression of personal identities, which can be seen as well to contribute in the proliferation of customization and "thrifting" in the fashion industry. Additionally, the binary gendered fashion, beauty, advertising and media industries produce oppression, anxiety and frustration, such as "fat-shaming", "bottom-shaming" and etc, not only to gender-nonconforming or gender-fluid communities, but also to those who are not perceived as the ideal portray of masculinity or femininity (Paoletti, 2015). As for fashion designer, the challenge and annoyance come from the forced adaptation to the binary gendered way of thinking. Artistic expression through fashion practice is almost impossible to be not involved



with the mix and match plays of signifiers of masculinity or femininity. For instance, stereotyped masculine or feminine colours would be demanded to differentiate the design of trainers between male and female, even though the construction of the trainers is identical. Another exemplification of this is that fashion items are usually styled together in editorial photographs in either a combination of masculine or feminine characteristics despite of the authentic messages implied in the designs.

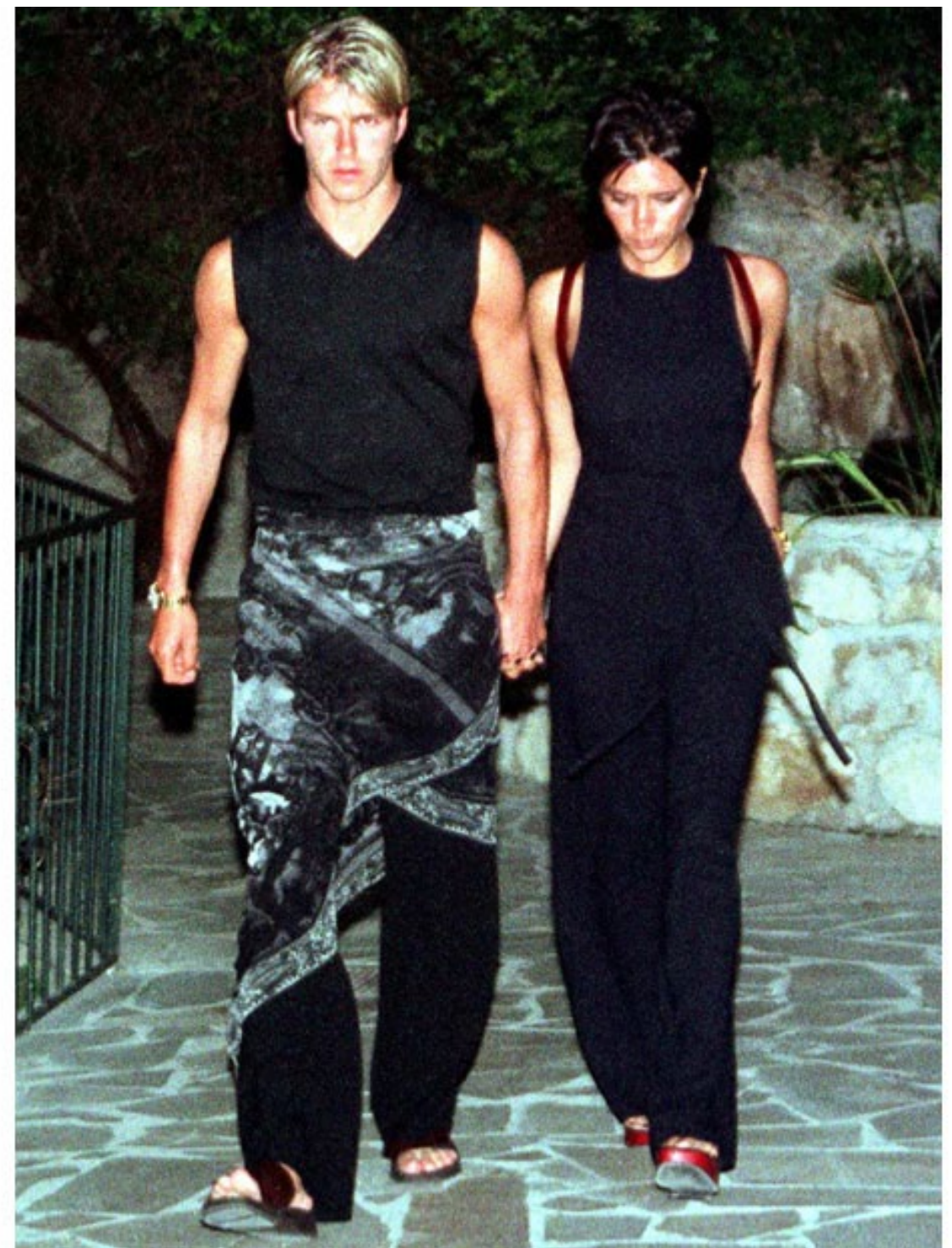
As Paoletti (2015, p. 169) suggested in her book "Sex and Unisex: Fashion, Feminism, and the Sexual Revolution ", the possibilities for surpassing the binary view of gender lie in two choices: no gender categories, or a finite but yet undetermined set of gender categories. In fashion and clothing industry, these two choices are represented by gender-less or non-gendered fashion and gendered fashion perceived to a variety of interpretations.

## 2.2 Gender border crossing

Despite the observed increase of more gendered styles and trends in fashion industry, many designers and professionals have also attempted to question the binary gendered fashion system of femininity and masculinity in the recent few decades. The mostly common method is to mix together and juxtapose different elements from both masculine and feminine categories in arbitrary ensembles irrespective of the biological or anatomical sex of the wearer, which is also known as gender border crossing in the academic field of fashion. This is exemplified by fashion editorials of many forward magazines such as i-D and the face, where masculine fashion items like bomber jackets or track suit are seen to be styled with feminine items such as pink sleeveless tops and tutus (Negrin, 2008). Similarly, designers like Jean-Paul Gaultier have made designs with free mixture of gendered signifiers. Gaultier presented outfits for men with fabrics and colours that normally suggesting female attire and appropriated traditional men's clothing such as sailor suits for women as well (Negrin, 2008). In the beauty industry, many skin care products and perfume which were once female exclusives started presenting themselves as non-differentiating between male and female customers (Negrin, 2008).

Although the current gender border crossing might seems to be a freewheeling play with no limits, Negrin (2008, p. 147) argued that it actually perpetuates, rather than challenges the binary logic of gender distinctions, since gender border crossing stays mobilising inside the binary gender system, around a particular category such as "women" or "men". This is firstly evidenced by the noticeable asymmetry for men's clothing and women's clothing in gender border crossing, representing the persistence of the dominance of male principle. In other words, female appropriations of male items of attire outnumber the movements in the opposite direction, in spite of the suggestion of reciprocity in gender borrowings. For instance, attempts where men seek to adopt elements of feminine clothing, such as the so-called "peacock" revolution in the 1970s, has tended to be relatively short-lived. While female adoptions of male clothing such as trousers, male styled shirts, coats present almost permanent stability in women's modern clothing (Negrin, 2008). Similarly, Negrin (2008, p. 148) suggested that the popularity of male celebrities such as Boy George who have

feminised their appearances has been mostly among female fans, according to analysis of Evans and Thornton (1989, p. 48). Boy George exhibits a "safe" femininity as a paradigm for his female fans rather than the male fans (Evans & Thornton, 1989, p. 48). Likewise, in most cases, androgynous clothing in contemporary fashion industry is in fact feminisations of male clothing, rather than the reverse. An exemplification of this in the workplace is the "dress for success look" promoted during the 1970s and 1980s (Negrin, 2008). It was a feminisation of masculine business suit – a fitted skirt and a matching jacket with characteristics such as shoulder padding and similar muted colours as the male version. The business suit is symbolic of serious professionalism and respect career-wise. Thus the fact that women's appropriation of male clothing items embodying such qualities is considered more widely acceptable and attractive than men's attempts to feminise their clothing, suggests a diminution of femininity, associating femininity with inferior qualities that needs compensation in the workplace from masculinity in order to function in the same status, as suggested by Negrin (2008, p. 149). Correspondingly, the dominance of male principle also applies to the gender border crossing in the leisure wear field. The recent examples of "androgynous" outfits in casual wear are variations of sport wear clothing, such as t shirt, track suit, sweatpants and etc. Although there is no differentiation between these clothing for male or female customers in most of the cases, the based models of the design of these "androgynous" clothing are once exclusively male clothing items. This can also apply to jeans and denim wear (Negrin, 2008). On occasions when men incorporate feminine elements into their clothing, these inventions and experiments usually derives from a variation of previously existed men's clothing items that embody a sense of femininity rather than a masculinisation of female attire. This can be exemplified by the presentation of sarongs by Jean-Paul Gaultier (ABSOLUTE/D'ARCANGELI, 1998) or works of designers who designed kilts for their men's lines, as sarongs and kilts are traditionally male clothing items for the specific cultural sources the designers sought inspirations from (Negrin, 2008). Henceforth, sarongs and kilts are in fact variations of traditional ethnic or cultural men's clothing items for imitating female dress in these cases, rather than masculinisation of a skirt. As has been noted, the current endeavours of gender border crossing has not made its way out of the binary logic of gender distinctions, it continues to perpetuates the hegemony of masculine and feminine clothing and appearance with the compensable



*Figure 2. David Beckham in a Sarong by Jean-Paul Gaultier (ABSOLUTE/D'ARCANGELI, 1998)*

option of a mixture of both quality in order for female clothing to seek for more authorities in the system of dominance of male principle.

Instead of recognising it as representation of a transcendence of gender boundaries, Negrin (2008, p. 157) further argued that, gender border crossings in contemporary fashion serves more as a reconfiguration and re-negotiation, if not, reconfirmation or intensification to the binary gender system of fashion and clothing. For instance, the marketing of male appropriations of products and fashion items, that were once widely recognised as typical female exclusive or feminine, is actually in a way reassures and intensifies men of their masculinity. Jewelleries such as neck chains and earrings were borrowed by men's fashion and serve as embellishment of sub-culture styles that accentuating masculinity and masculine activities. Similarly, male fragrances are promoted and marketed with signifiers of masculinity in spite of the connection of its origins to femininity. Firstly, the marketing strategies of men's fragrance products have been aiming to differentiate them from the female versions. These products are usually named or known as "fragrance", "cologne", "eau-de-toilette", or "aftershave", intended to avoid the use of the word "perfume", therefore disassociate them from femininity that is connected to the origins of perfume or fragrance products (Negrin, 2008). The design of fragrance containers for men also presents rather masculine appearances, with more minimalistic looks, toned down colours or chunkier shapes resembling a hip flask and etc, comparing to the design of women's perfume bottles. Additionally, there is a clearly visible association in the advertisements of men's fragrance products to traditionally masculine outdoor sports activities like surfing and etc, or to an image of professional men in business suit who demonstrate a sense of authoritative and confident masculinity. Even in fashion editorials where male model are styled with a mixture of traditionally masculine and feminine clothing items, an alternative or variation of masculinity is suggested and preformed rather than a transcendence of masculinity, as the anatomical features and facial expressions presented by the models stage an assertive boyishness. Masculinity nevertheless has never been challenged or surpassed within the practices of the gender border crossings for me in this case (Negrin, 2008).

In conclusion, the current gender border crossing attempts function as modification or supplements of the persistent binary gender model in fashion with

new options such as androgyny, ambiguity. These attempts do not sit outside the binary system, nor do they transcend and resolve the problems caused by the binary logic of gender. A possible solution to surpass the binary gender system in fashion is the renouncement of gender categories in fashion (non-gendered or genderless fashion).

# Chapter 3

## Fashion, gender and anti-gender

This chapter provides background knowledge for the tools and elements of my design methodology and then elaborates the practical procedures of my methodology based on the knowledge of the definition and relationship of masculinity and femininity and their visual signifiers in fashion and clothing. The key concepts for the design practice are the traditional definition of masculinity and femininity as well as the visual signifiers of them, as these concepts and visual signifiers will be used in denial in the design practice of my collection. Due to the fact that gender identities or the constitutions of masculinity and femininity have changed and evolved drastically through the time and continues to transform and be updated to the future, therefore, this chapter focuses on the originality of the culturally constructed gender distinctions and identities from the nineteenth century in Western European cultures, which had been globalised to some extent in the contemporary age. From the knowledge of the originality of the clear differentiations in gender identities through fashion and clothing, the chapter shows a glimpse of what gender identities and their visual signifiers have become in the current society.

This chapter starts with the discussion of whether the characteristics of masculinity and femininity are natural or cultural, from which it further explains the function of the visual signifiers of clothing and fashion in the process of constructing gender identities. By introducing the suggestions and claims of theorists, such as Berger, Barnard and Mulvey, this chapter demonstrates what the portrait of the relationship and situation of masculinity and femininity is now. This relationship is the womb to generate gender binary system, because either masculinity or femininity is defined according to its relationship to another. Masculinity is what femininity is not. This is followed by the originality of the visible differences in gender identities and their corresponding clothing and fashion styles. The explanation of this is divided into two parts. The first part aims to illustrate the definition of femininity and the construction of femininity through fashion and clothing in the nineteenth century, and the second part briefly explains the reason behind this gender differentiation as well as the definition and construction of masculinity.

The second section of this chapter introduces my practical procedures of the methodology of denying gender signifiers in fashion. This methodology is built up based on the knowledge of the relationship and definition of masculinity and

femininity and the visual signifiers of that in fashion and clothing, explained and analysed in the first section. The denial of gender is an act transforming fashion and clothing into its corresponding genderless version. This process of denying gender contains four stages according to the four parts in the process of fashion design. The visual signifiers of stereotyped gender binary system were denied from the first stage of choosing the bases for developing the collection to the garment construction and textile design and finally the form of presentation with styling and accessories.

## 3.1 Gender characteristics in fashion

### 3.1.1 The relationship of masculinity and femininity

In order to understand how fashion and clothing make contributions to the construction of gender identities, it is essential to acknowledge first that the shaping of the concept of masculinity and femininity is a cultural rather than natural process. As Malcolm Barnard (2002, p. 117) explained in his book "Fashion as Communication", gender can be recognised as a cultural phenomenon and gender distinctions are cultural differences insofar as gender is determined by the presence and absence of a certain set of appropriate characteristics that are culturally constructed conceptions, comparing to sex, whose differentiation is signalled by the presence and absence of a certain set of biological bodily parts equipped necessarily for reproduction. Gender being culturally constructed could be exemplified by the fact that the set of appropriate characteristics considering to be masculinity or femininity varies from culture to culture. One certain characteristic that one cultural perceived within the set of masculine characteristics could signal femininity in another culture. Barnard (2002, p. 118) further suggested that, gender differentiation is established by the methods of "the wearing or not wearing of a particular garment, colour, texture, size or style of garment" in a culture. This is evidenced by that the wearing or not of a pair of trousers signalled the difference of male and female in the West during the nineteenth century.



The situation and relationship of the culturally constructed roles of men and women in Western European cultures could be well described by Berger's famous formulation – "men act, women appears" (Berger, 1972, p. 47). In other words, it means that the characteristic role for men in Western European cultures is to be active, to be the spectator who surveys and observes the opposite sex and the characteristic position for women is to be comparatively passive, to be the spectacles who are surveyed and observed by the opposite sex as well as observes themselves being observed (Barnard, 2002). In this sense, femininity is depreciated to appearances and clothing, as Berger (1972, p. 46) suggested, women observe how they appear to men, because it is significant for what is normally recognised as the success for their lives. Mulvey (1989, p. 19) further specified that women on this account are playing the "traditional exhibitionist role" correspondingly to men's role of voyeurism. The male gaze is considered under the context as controlling and objectifying the other person as a sexual stimulation through sight. Therefore, a controlling, sexually objectifying male gaze is tied up to the set of characteristics for masculinity as well as narcissism, exhibitionism and submissiveness to the set of characteristics for femininity.

### 3.1.2 Masculinity and Femininity in clothing

According to Steele (1989, p. 15), gender differentiation in clothing and fashion in the Western cultures became strongly visible only after the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Men were wearing silk, elaborative clothing, cosmetics, perfumes and etc. similar to women until this time. This also provides evidences for perceiving gender distinctions in fashion and clothing as culturally constructed and relatively new inventions instead of innate, natural and traditional ideology. Oakley (1981, p. 83) argued that, during nineteenth century, especially in the 1830s and 1840s, the constitution of the set of characteristics of femininity included "frivolity, delicacy, inactivity and submissiveness." The meaning of the word "delicacy" in femininity was to be fragile and vulnerable physically and mentally, as well as inappropriate for any kinds of efforts that requires physical strength or hardworking. The deemed appropriate characteristics for femininity was to portray the almost breakability in every movements, every breath and every moment and the exhaustion of any attempt of exertion. The word "delicacy" in femininity here was generated and confirmed by the wearing of corset. The restrictiveness of a corset on the one hand damages

the physical or anatomical health of the wearer by its unnaturally small-sized waist which pushes the bodily organs and tissues in a harmful position and situation, thus the wearing of a corset results in a more physically delicate or unhealthy state of the wearer that enhance the conformation of the set of feminine characteristics of the wearer. On the other hand, the wearing of a corset restricts, complicates and problematises the bodily movement of any kinds, makes every bodily movement more strength-consuming for the wearer comparing to the not wearing of a corset. Thus the wearers appear to be more delicate and fragile when they move because of the extra strength they need to put in every movement and this also make the wearers of corset closer to the imagine of a ideological feminine woman. The word "frivolity" means not serious minded and not interested into meaningful or valuable things. "Frivolity" in femininity is created by associating women with a sense of obsession to "not serious" matters, specifically, the major one in this group is fashion and clothing. The idea of fashion, clothing, cosmetics and other adornments being merely obsessions of women is also created to force women's identity to the direction of the deemed appropriate set of feminine characteristics. It is also a new invention rather than a tradition. This idea also promotes the process of reducing women into just narcissistic appearances or spectacles. Women's "submissiveness" in femininity essentially hints women's subservient status in the family in the nineteenth century. Women were considered to be a property of their husband and the spectacle of their clothing and other adornments were a sign of the economical status of their husbands. The sense of "submissiveness" was generated by the lack of "aggressiveness" of women, which was also a result of the restrictiveness of the female clothing at that time. This is well exemplified by the constructed sleeves of female clothing, as Oakley (1981, p. 83) claimed, the low position and construction of the sleeves prevented women from aggressive gestures of their arms, even to the extent that women wearing this kinds of sleeves were unable to raise their arms to the same height as their shoulder. Other weight loaded decorations on the clothing were also restrictions for aggressive gestures. On this account, the wearers of these kinds of restrictively constructed clothing are disabled from "aggressiveness" therefore also appeared to be conforming to the set of appropriate characteristics of femininity.

The invention of tailoring techniques had already made men's clothing and

women' clothing relatively different according to the difference of male and female figures. However, as mentioned above, drastic gender distinctions in fashion and clothing were marked only since the nineteenth century, because up to this time, men's clothing was just as elaborate and decorative as women's clothing. Due to the significant changes in the society, for example, the industrial revolution, there was a demand for men's identities to be different in the nineteenth century. In order to establish this different personal or gender identities, men abandoned the extra adornments and bright colours and started to adopt a "simple, plain, drab and sober" garment style, together with the wearing of the trousers (Barnard, 2002, p. 124). What was suggested by the adoption of this rather plainer clothing style and trousers is a new gender identity of "robustness, fitness and strength" into the set of characteristic of masculinity (Barnard, 2002, p. 124). These new characteristics are tied up to the quality of "discipline, reliability and honesty" that was strongly demanded by the industry and commerce brought by the social changes of the Industrial Revolution and the development of capitalism (Rouse, 1989, p. 11). In other words, these qualities were essential at the time for men to make a living or economical advancement in the world of industry and commerce. In contrast to this, clothing style for men in the previous period with adornments such as fur, jewelleries, ruffles and vibrant colours and etc, similar to the adornments of women's clothing was neither able to demonstrate these required new characteristics of masculinity, nor to even differentiate masculinity from femininity at the time. Thus men's clothing was reduced to a simpler, plainer and not decorative style. Together with the wearing of trousers, this new clothing style constructed, built and reflected these new characteristics of masculinity which seemed more appropriate for the period. Moreover, once these characteristics were decided as appropriate within the set of characteristics of gender identities, other elements in fashion and clothing which could be use to demonstrate these qualities were gradually included into the set or into the process of forming the set. Many of these signifiers in fashion and clothing still remain visible in the society now.

## 3.2 The denial of gender

### 3.2.1 The selection of "unisex" clothing items

The design method of de-gendering firstly started with the selection of clothing items recognised as unisex in contemporary fashion industry to be the base items for the shape and silhouette design of my collection. These clothing items are considered to be classics for both male and female attire, and they have been stripped off most of the gender connotations that were once forced on them. In other words, the wearing of these clothing items does not demonstrate any characteristics of masculinity or femininity in the context of contemporary society. However, these items became unisex mostly through the process of gender border crossing, which was mentioned in the previous chapter as not surpassing the binary logic of gender. Specifically, the majority of these unisex clothing items are female appropriation of male attire, which still reflects inequality and dominance of male principle. (Negrin, 2008, p. 147) Thus, in order to be non-gendered or genderless, these unisex clothing items would need to be further de-gendered with my design process, especially, the masculinity features from the originality of these wardrobe items would be diminished. The selection of the unisex wardrobe items as the bases for my collection contains the tracksuit, the T-shirt, the shorts, the denim jacket and trousers, the suit, the Mac coat, the trench coat and the skirt or kilt.

### 3.2.2 Garment construction

The shape and silhouette design in the garment construction process of my collection aimed to disassociate the selection of "unisex" clothing items with any remaining connotation to the binary logic of gender. That is, firstly I distorted and deconstructed the items that derive from the female appropriations of male attire in order to diminish the originality of these clothing enhancing a male-like body shape. Therefore, these items could be stripped off the remaining last sense of masculinity that forced them into the binary gendered fashion system. The method







*Previous: Figure 3 . Method 1 - De-humanising on the Denim Jacket*  
*Opposite: Figure 3 . Method 2 - Fragmenting on the Trench Coat*



I used to approach this goal is to totally misbalance and misplace the segments of these garments by shifting the clothing panels constituted these garments from the original part of the body where the panels were supposed to cover. The process of shifting then resulted in the changes of relationships between each panel, specifically, how they are connected, how wide is the connecting panel, how the seam appears, how long are the slits, and etc. Meanwhile, the construction of these segments, such as darts, seams, slits, would lose its practical sartorial function to serve the transformation into emphasising the ideal biological features of male or female body. This doesn't mean that the seams, darts and slits no longer creates shapes and silhouette for the garments, but what is really does is to dislocate the shapes and silhouettes formed by the garment construction segments with the parts of the body appearing with identical shapes and silhouettes. Thus to some extent, the human body covered by the deconstructed clothing items is distorted and even de-humanised, as the garment construction doesn't obey the figure of human body, but appears to be independent and disconnected from the shapes of human body. In this sense, both the covered human body and the clothing items become alien and unable to be categorised by the binary logic of gender, or to be defined as whether unisex, gender border crossing or androgynous. These clothing items only serve the human body or use human body as supportive structures rather than imitating the shapes of human body, thus we can no longer put any gender connotations on them, the same way as we cannot exclude the use of furniture or sculptures from one specific gender. They can be only defined as non-gendered or genderless and function similarly to furniture or sculptures. This method is my interpretation of the displacing garment construction of punk style in the use of generating resistance and escape from the binary system of gender. In my opinions, clothing and fashion can express the authentic personal identity only in a way when clothing and fashion are tools for the expression personal identity rather than become personal identity as well as clothing and fashion play the identities construction game within the binary system of gender, whether as femininity, masculinity or the combination – "androgyny".

Another method to approach the idea of genderless by garment construction is to exaggerate and reveal the unexpended parts of the body. In other words, these parts of the body are not traditionally exaggerated or revealed. This method is

realised through changing the length of certain clothing panels, cutting open slits or constructing practical seams. This process disassembles the human body as a whole unity and breaks the unity into illusionary or surreal fragments. This is due to the post modern concept of personal identity being fragmented and malleable. Through this choice, I wanted to underline the idea that the fragmented garment could be effective in expressing the fragmented personal identity, as the fragments of the garments share a loose connection and each of them could to some extent independently expression seemingly unrelated characterises. In the meantime, because the revealed parts of the body are unexpected and unconventional, the biological features of these parts of the body appear to be confusing and unclear as well as the gender, race or ethical connotation attached to it become undetermined. This process further guarantees the independence of the expression of fashion detached from the ideal beauty standard of gender, race and ethics, as only the unexpected parts of the body would participate into the expression of clothing and the fit of the clothing does not determine the quality or the aesthetics of the outfit. For instance, the hip area revealed through the cut open slits of the trench coat in look 1 is the only visible part of the human body participating in the shape and silhouette of the whole look. The human body here functions only as supportive structure and appears in a fragmented way, a muscular body would not make the garments appear more ideal than a less muscular body. Thus in this way, the design of the collection could offer a more democratic alternative in fashion and clothing for expressing the contemporary personal identity or individuality.

### 3.2.3 Textile and colours

The textile design of my collection also started with the selection of the materials (fabrics, yarns), based on the methodology of denying gender, for the bases of making the design. The selection here includes cotton, viscose and Lurex. The selection of cotton and viscose and the textile formations in my collection of cotton, viscose target to exhibit the quality of universality or democracy, in other words, genderless, because the use of cotton and viscose is not limited and promoted to one certain gender. The use of Lurex yarns is inspired from punk styles. In punk styles,

Lurex, together with other synthetic, or plastic material in clothes were to challenge and mock the ideal aesthetics concerning material and textile of the middle class at that time, because these plastic-like materials were considered as cheap, ugly and trashy or low-quality (Barnard, 2002, p. 137). The Lurex yarns in my collection are weaved in the floats structure and appears to be messy, frizzy and chaotically shiny. The use of Lurex in my collection also operate as visual signifiers of opposing and resisting highly gendered ideal aesthetics in contemporary society promoted by the advertising industry and the celebrities.

Since the binary logic of gender combines different elements into two sets of fixed characteristics, femininity is presented as "frivolity, delicacy, inactivity and submissiveness" (Oakley, 1981, p. 83), while masculinity is portrayed to be "simple, plain, drab and sober" (Barnard, 2002, p. 124). My method of de-gendering the textile surfaces is to create textures which cannot be categorised within the two fixed characteristics. That is to make the surface and the texture very durable in contrast to delicacy required by femininity and at the same time very complicated in contrast to simplicity required by masculinity. Several textile techniques including the fields of printing, knitting, and weaving and fabric manipulation were applied to achieve this rugged complicity on the texture and surfaces. Firstly, the cotton and viscose fabrics I used are weaved with thick yarns either in heavy satin structures for interior purposes or twill structures known as denim for heavy work wear purposes. These structures are so thick and durable that the fabrics can form perfect shapes without any interfacings or supporting applications. Two layers of these fabrics were later quilted or pleated together into new pieces of fabrics with two layer structure and hence doubled their thickness and durability. After the techniques of quilting and pleating, these fabrics became almost armour-like and cannot be related to delicacy at all. Other techniques including patchworks, appliqué, raw edges, top-stitching, jacquard weave structures, holes cutting, bleaching, reactive dye printing by hand, digital printing, and washing, together with pleating were applied to make the textures and surfaces complicated and rich in a disordered, messy and chaotic manner. The treatment of these techniques made the fabric neither simple nor decorative in a traditional understanding, because the textures and surfaces appear old, used, worn out and with no regular patterns in comparing to the elaborative quality required by both male and

female decorations. I would suggest they are decorative and durable in a genderless manner. This messy and chaotic textures and surfaces treatment is also inspired by the punk style and function as visual signifiers to against the ideal aesthetics of newness and high-quality promoted by the advertising industry, the celebrities and social media. Additionally, the textiles in my collection feature an unfinished or in-the process quality, as the surface of the raw edges and floats changes through time by how the wearers use these garments. Henceforth, the appearance of the garments will be individually different and demonstrate the continuously changing personal identity of individuals. A physically more active wearer would have the garments with longer raw edges, bigger holes or even more holes by accidents, more broken floats and uneven pleats than a relatively inactive wearer.

The colour selection of my collection is limited into black, white, grey, red and blue. By the use of these colours, I aim to also indicate the idea of universality, in other words, non-gendered or genderless quality. Black, white and grey are not considered to be male or female exclusive or indicative, despite their connotations to funeral and wedding occasions in the Western cultures. Red and blue might be associated with gender qualities, but more importantly, they are primary colours that can generate the most of the colours that human eyes can perceive. On this account, red and blue can be also recognised as universal and not limited or promoted for a certain group of people.



*Opposite: Figure 5 . De-gendering Textile Design for the Suit*





### 3.2.4 Styling and details

The genderless quality in styling is generated by two processes. Firstly by the use of trainer or sports shoes and hoods designed from my personal items for protection from cold weather. The trainers had made their appearances in both female and male wardrobe for a long time. Although fashion industry has tended to differentiate female or male trainers with colours and decorative details that hints the gendered connotations. The model of trainer I selected is the basic white laced on one with rubber soles, which are widely used in almost every occasion despite of the wearer's gender. The rubber soles are used in relation to the original version of trainer or sport shoes in the nineteenth century by the working class. The base item for the design of the hoods is also marked as non-gendered or genderless, although the hoods might be associated with the look of Pussy Riot balaclava and its radical connotations behind. Secondly, the prints on the shoes also behave as my manifestos for genderless quality in fashion.



*Opposite: Figure 6 . Look 1 trainer shoes*





*Figure 6 Prototype of the balaclava hood*

# Chapter 4

## The practice of genderless fashion



This chapter explains the practical information of the experiment of genderless fashion. It starts by the first section introducing my inspiration from punk. In the first section, I analyse the visual signifiers and "DIY" methods in punk style as well as elaborate the inspiration of punk in two parts. Firstly, the "DIY" methods for resisting the aesthetics of class hegemony is appropriated and interpreted by me for the purpose of refusing gender connotations in clothing and fashion. This inspired me to come up with the methods of denying gender, which was mentioned in the previous chapter. Secondly, some visual elements of punk style are interpreted into elements of my collection with the twists of my designer aesthetics. The second section offers information of how I incorporate the genderless artistic language of expression of Ren Hang's photography and poetry into my fashion design practice. His poems are transformed into graphics and the digital print for my collection. The 3-9 sections demonstrate the design process of the 6 looks in my collection. It is a detailed description of how I applied the method of denying visual signifiers of gender in the textile and garment construction processes of each clothing items.

## 4.1 Inspiration – punk

Whenever I think of any forms of resistance and rebel in fashion culture to fight back an outdated system of values and mindsets, punk is always the first thing that comes to my mind before other attempts, such as even the burning bra of the feminists. Even though in the current fashion industry, punk has been appropriated by the mainstream fashion and reduced to merely visual signifiers that could be borrowed by any kinds of fashion practice, including the mainstream (Barnard, 2002, p. 138). Therefore, the resistance and denial of the bourgeoisies' values and aesthetics could no longer be represented by the punk style nowadays and punk style is neither involved in the battle of challenging hegemony and class inequality as it used to be. It is not outrageous to claim that punk style now represents conformation to the values and mindsets of the middle class and hence enforce the persistent class hegemony, as the adoption of punk style by the privileged are almost ubiquitous on social media like Instagram and YouTube.

Even though the visual signifiers of punk style have lost their connections to resistance and opposition, the methodology that punk used in producing subversive distortion to the mainstream fashion still remains highly relevant. What I found inspirational to my collection is exactly the methods of distortion in punk, because distortion as oppositional to the normal, or the mainstream is in its nature unable to be adopted by the mainstream. One thing considered being the mainstream or normal cannot be recognised as the distortion any more. The methods that punk styles use to expression opposition and resistance to the outdated values and mindsets are to create garments or adornments imitating the aesthetics of these values through the process of "do it yourself". The garments and adornments are superficially similar to the aesthetics of the outdated values, but innately they are different, as these garments and adornments are actually ensembles of visual signifiers and elements despised by the privileged. The essential in these methods is to use elements or treatment techniques which are considered to be ugly, cheap and invaluable by the aesthetics of outdated values representing inequality. For examples, rips, holes and spikes are used in punk style to destroy the quality on the surface of being new, flawless and high class, which was appreciated in the 70s by the middle class. Misplaced pleats, seams, patches and other segments in the garment constructions demonstrate resistance and opposition to the aesthetics they imitate artificially by creating an extorted version of the paradigms. Graphics and placement prints appear in a more straightforward way by displaying information that was considered to be violating moral rules, as Hebdige (1979, p. 114) suggested that punk clothes functioned as "the sartorial equivalent of swearing words."

I brought the methods of opposition and resistance in punk styles into almost every aspect of my design practice. Specifically, I used techniques including rips or floats (the imitation of rips in jacquard structure), pleats, bleaching, holes, patches, quilting stitches, to treat on the surfaces of the textiles of my collection. The plaids and explicit graphics were reinterpreted by my design aesthetics and then applied as the patterns for the print and woven design of the textiles and shoes. In the garment construction part, the misplacing method of punk style was also adopted in my own reinterpreted perspective. Additionally, I used safety pins, which are widely recognised as a sign of punk style, as "yarns" to make the textile for one garment of my collection,





*Figure 7 . Johnny Rotten in a Ripped Sweater (Young, 1976)*



*Figure 8 . Sex Pistol lived in Sweden, 1977 (Dennis Morris, 1977)*

rather than as decorations to the garment. Safety pins are now elements of the aesthetics of dominant values, because they appearing as decorative elements in punk styles have been appropriated and adopted by the mainstream fashion now. Therefore, safety pins function as the garment itself rather a decorative element in my collection.

As mentioned above, the selection of the elements or the methods borrowed from punk to my collection is based on whether these methods are still effective in representing the ideology behind it and whether the ideology they represent are still relevant or not. The textile treatment of the methods were used to express similar ideas as it was used in punk, to against the surface quality of being new, flawless and high-class, which remains highly appreciated by the dominant aesthetics now. On this account, the dominant aesthetics are what serves the enforcement and conformation of inequality in gender, class, race and other social aspects. The distortion methods were used to deconstruct the paradigm of fashion industry now rather than in the 70s. The exact information these methods carry in my collection is different from what was in the 70s punk, but these methods and element serve for the same purpose either in my practice or punk, which is to resist and oppose.

## 4.2 Inspiration – Ren Hang

Another inspiration contributed to the design of my fashion collection is the poetry and photographic artworks of Chinese artist Ren Hang, whose works belong to the scene of subculture or youth culture in contemporary China. Ren Hang (1987-2017) was a photographer and poet in Beijing, famously known by his provocative photographic works containing nudity and eccentric postures that was used to demonstrate rebuttal to the stereotyped image of gender, sexuality and minorities by the authorities or the traditional culture. I found that the connection or similarity between Ren Hang's works and punk is their stand of refusing and resisting perceived social errors or inequality issues with their works. The spirit of political provocativeness and rebel is the core of both punk and Ren Hang's artworks. This spirit is as well what I aim to embody and express in my collection. Therefore, I thought by combining these two inspirations with my own twist as a fashion designer, I am able to generate my own fight against restrictions from binary logic of gender in personal identities and fashion with the same standing of refusal and resistance as Ren Hang and punk.

My memories of Ren Hang's works dated back to the time when I was still doing my Bachelor degree in Shanghai University and Ren Hang was still an indie artist before gaining worldwide fame. I was scrolling down my social media feeds and saw a repost of an advertisement for volunteering model recruitment in a photographic project that requires nudity. This repost caught my attention because in a relatively traditional and conservative society like China, I assumed this kind of advertisement for nudity volunteering would not received as much applications as expected, if not, none. At the same time, I really appreciated him working with real-life people, who are not professionals. Because I believe that when art includes people outside art, it become down to earth and thus democratic to more audience and will influence more people. This is also the direction what I aim my work towards. Additionally, I was going through a rebel phase as a 17 year's old teen, so I hoped to participate in an adult-like project including nudity and sexual connotations to against others' stereotyped image of me being childish looking. The last two thoughts relating to the qualities of being down to earth and rebellious later contributed

significantly in my identity as a fashion designer. As I was reading through the advertisement by Ren Hang, his works immediately caught my eyes and I was thrilled with joy. Because I had never seen such explicit and straightforward way of expressing concerns relating gender and sexuality in Chinese art scene before. These concerns of gender and sexuality in Ren Hang's works had also come across my mind numerous times during my growing up, which later led to the initiative of doing this thesis.

My inspiration of Ren Hang came from two parts. The first part is his photographic works. Even though his photography is considered to be highly sexual and erotic, the nudity of human body in his works are reduced to non-gendered props, as he said in a 2013 interview by VICE magazine, "Gender isn't important when I'm taking pictures, it only matters to me when I'm having sex" (VICE Japan, 2013). The way of how Ren Hang approached this idea is to only present parts of human body in ensembles of seemingly inhuman postures, for example, several arms and hands pinching one side of a woman's breasts imitating the shape of a sunflower (my collage of Ren Hang's artworks). The strange combination of eroticism and genderless quality challenges the fixed conservative mindset and prompts more questions concerning gender and sexuality. I combined the inspiration from Ren Hang's method of de-gendering and de-humanising human body with the resistant method of punk into the garment construction part of my collection. Specifically, the garments of my collection cover almost entirely the whole body, but leave cuts, slits and holes to show unexpected part of human body. Human body is fragmented in my design and thus de-humanised and de-gendered into props or merely technical support of the presentation of the garments (picture of the back of look 1).

The second and the most important part of the inspiration from Ren Hang is his poetry. Ren Hang's poems were kept as his journal of daily thoughts and cover a wide range of different topics in his life, such as love, depression, sex, art, fear, homosexuality, society, and loneliness and etc. Many of these things are also happening in a similar way to his in my life as well as life of many of the generation of Millennials in China or worldwide. These topics from Ren Hang's poems may not be gender-focused as his photography, but they are extremely significantly connected to my identity both personal and fashion-wise, and also very provocative and radical that leads people into thinking about things including gender. I read through all







the poems that Ren Hang posted on his blog and selected my personal favourites. I later translated all the poems from the selections into English when there was no publication of a translated English version of his poetry. The translated poems of Ren Hang were printed on A4 papers. I glued all these papers on the walls of my 10 m<sup>2</sup> student-apartment room and locked myself in the room with these poems for a few days to let my imagination visualise the content of all these poems (picture of poem papers on my wall.) Then I drew 6 illustrations in a style of Naoko Takagi's illustration books which were very popular in my generation when I was in junior high and whose style is rather childish. In this way, the expression of sexual content of the poems became even more radical as I fabricated the sexuality of the content into a childish form (pictures of my illustration). These illustrations worked as inspiration and elements of my print design in my fashion collection (pictures of the print during digital printing).

## 4.3 Look 1 the trench coat, vest and shorts

Look 1 consists of a trench coat, a sports vest and a pair of shorts and the accessories – a pair of trainer and a balaclava hood. The materials of the look contains two jacquard fabrics designed entirely by me and woven in a weaving mill, a heavy cotton denim fabric ordered from the UK and dyed by me and a faux-leather fabric bought from a local fabric supply. The front of the trench coat was made by the jacquard fabric in the grids pattern and denim was used to produce the back. The shorts were made completely from the jacquard fabric with the stripes pattern and the faux-leather fabric was made into the sports vest.

The two jacquard fabrics were woven with the same structures but with different graphic patterns. The design of the grids pattern is my interpretation of the plaids fabrics used in punk style and drawn with Illustrator in a style of the painting Broadway Boogie Woogie by Piet Mondrian, because my artistic aesthetics are largely influenced by the Modernism art from the start. The messy and plastic floats on the texture and the geometric pattern target to create a "trashy" and non-human (therefore non-gendered) image of the textile. The stripes pattern is a variation of the grids pattern. These two fabrics are woven in a one warp and two weft systems with the warp density of 24 ends/ cm and weft density of 60 picks/ cm. The denim fabric was also dyed by me with reactive dyes in a washing machine.

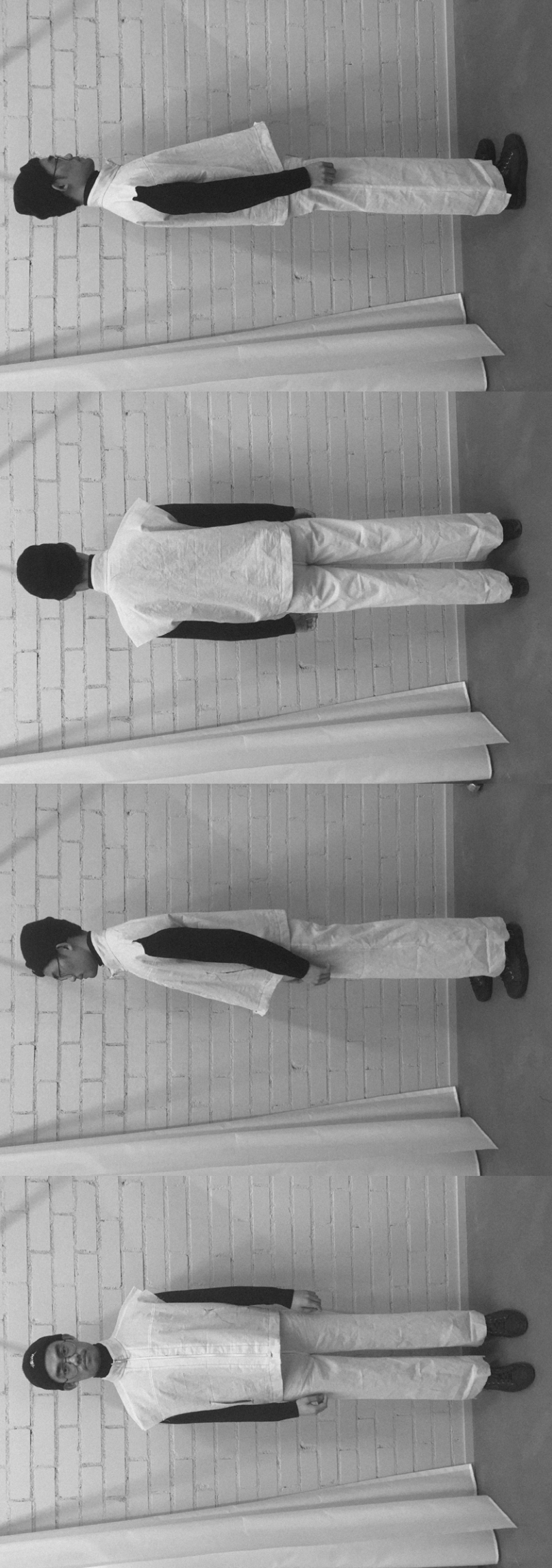
The trench coat is a combination of classic trench coat and denim jacket. It was created out of the base of a men's size 56 classic trench coat pattern with around 30 cm ease added to the bust circumference. The collar was altered into 12 cm wide with a 3 cm stand together with an extended 15 cm lapel in order to transform the masculinity and formality of the classic trench coat into a less gendered quality of casualness. The raglan sleeves of the trench coat were also replaced by two-piece drop shoulder sleeves developed from the style of kimono sleeves to enhance the quality of being genderless and democratic. Because the kimono sleeves, originated as not gender-exclusive, allow more space and freedom for the arms' movements comparing to the relatively restrictive raglan sleeves of the classic trench coat. The other part of





*Opposite: Figure 11 . Look 1 Prototypes*

*Upper: Figure 12 . Jacquard No.1*





the front side of the trench coat remains almost as identical as the classic trench coat pattern, while the back side presents no relation to the classic trench coat except the back flap. Covered by the back flap, the upper part of the back side is generated from the back of a denim jacket and two lower panels are attached by five metal snaps to the waistband of the back. These triangular lower back clothing panels overlap with each other in a way imitating the method of shifting the clothing panel for a de-gendered and de-humanised look used in most of the other designs of my collection. The two lower panels can be also detached from the waistband and reveal a part of the wearer's hip area which appears illusionary and gender-undetermined. The idea of assembling and mixing a classic trench coat with denim jacket aims to casualise the formality of the classic trench coat attached to the characteristics of masculinity.

The shorts were designed from the men's size 28 jeans pattern with two side pockets, two back patch pockets and a zipped fly. The casual and genderless quality is realized here by lowering the crotch level and straightening the inside and outside seam. By doing this, the legs of the human body wearing the shorts are extracted into two cylinder shapes, the organic curves of the human legs and hip indicating the information of biological sex are hidden and diminished.

The vest was converted from the men's size 42 tracksuit jacket pattern. The sleeves of the tracksuit pattern were removed and replaced by folded armhole hems. The detail of zipped pockets and stand collar were referenced from the current version of tracksuit.

## 4.4 Look 2 the denim jacket, suit trousers

Look 2 consists of a denim jacket, a pair of suit trousers, a pair of trainer shoes and a balaclava. I used black cotton denim for the jacket and a jacquard fabric for the suit trousers. The choice of black cotton denim is due to its universality. The denim fabric was ordered from local fabric supply. The jacquard fabric were woven with the same pattern and structures as the stripe jacquard fabric of the shorts in look 1, but the red yarns used for the second weft system was replaced by blue Lurex yarns to create blue shades instead of red shades in this fabric. The production of this jacquard fabric was introduced in the section of look 1.

The jacket was made out of a men's size 46 denim jacket. In the classic denim jacket pattern, there are four seams on the front side to reduce the circumference from chest to waist. These seams together with slightly extended shoulder length enhance the body of the wearer into an ideal masculine shape with wide shoulders, large pectoral muscles and a relatively small waist indicating solid and tight abdominal muscles. My redesign of the denim jacket aimed to distort this ideal masculine shape achieved by wearing a denim jacket and convert it into a genderless and de-humanised shape. The method was to shift the left and right side clothing panels of a denim jacket, specifically, to take the second button as the centre point and rotate the left side of the jacket counter clockwise and the right side clockwise, so that the collars would be farer away from the neck. I used draping technique here instead of pattern-making to achieve this alteration. That was to cut the centre back line and insert the extra width (sector shape pieces), required by this rotation, to the centre back line and the side seams. The shapes of garment construction for creating chest muscles and wide shoulder still exist, but these shapes were dislocated from the place where the chest muscles and shoulder belong in human body. The altered version of the body in the redesigned denim jacket does not obey the anatomical structure of neither male or female body, and thus exhibits a genderless or even alien figure. The natural shoulder points are blurred and similar artificial shapes appear on the upper arm. On this account, the wearer's body is reduced into a cylinder shape structure and the garments works as independent sculptures supported by the cylinder structure.



*Opposite: Figure 13 . Look 2 Denim Jacket Prototype*

Additionally, the back of the jacket was lengthened and side seams were changed into slits to enhance the alien and sculpture quality of the design.

The design of the suit trousers was based on men's size 28 suit trousers pattern. The straight-leg suit trousers were commonly seen in the punk style. In order to achieve the genderless interpretation of human legs by reducing them into cylinder shapes, I enlarged significantly the width of the trousers and remodelled a mediator between suit trousers and culottes. Two 10 cm pleats were constructed on each side of the trousers; hence the width of the trouser appears the same from the waist to the hemline. This is to ensure the straightness and cylinder cut of the trousers. The side seams from hipline below and the inside seams were altered into straight lines, thus 1 cm was added to the inside seam of the front panels to fix the different length of front and back inside seams. The redesigned suit trousers has two side pockets and a single welt pocket on the right back where the grain line of the stripe fabric is placed horizontally in contrast to the vertical grain line on the rest parts of the trousers. The length of the suit trousers is just above the trainer shoes.

## 4.5 Look 3 the shirt or dress and track suit trousers

Look 3 constitutes a long shirt/ dress, a pair of tracksuit trousers, a pair of trainers and a balaclava. The materials of this look are variations of the digitally printed stripe fabrics. The stripe pattern was made on Illustrator and inspired by the widely used stripe fabric in punk scenes. The proportion of the stripes is 0.6 cm for the black or grey stripes and 1.2 cm for the white stripes. This proportion was sampled and tested by me as the most eye-watering option out of ten. The width proportion of the stripes aimed to present a hallucinatory and aggressive image in corresponding to the radical and extreme perspective of gender and identity in the theory of my collection. The stripe pattern is also used universally in contemporary fashion industry with no exclusion of any gender, ethical or sexual minorities groups. The stripe pattern was digitally printed with reactive dyes on cotton satin fabrics in two colour ways - black/ white and grey/ white. The tracksuit trousers were made of the original stripe fabric in black/ white colour way and the material for the long shirt/ dress is a double-layer manipulated variation of the stripe fabric. The fabric for the long shirt/ dress is also my interpretation of the plaids pattern in punk styles. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the method of de-gendering the textile in my collection is to create textures and surfaces appearing as a combination of durability and complicatedness. In order to actualise these qualities on the materials for the long shirt/ dress, several fabric manipulation techniques including pleating, quilting, cutting holes and layering were applied to the stripe fabrics. Big holes with raw edges were firstly cut on the stripe fabric in black/ white colour way. The after cut black/ white stripe fabric was then layered on the top of the grey/ white stripe fabric. The big holes could reveal the pattern of the under layer. The pattern on the top was aligned with the pattern on the holes of the under layer, but the colour (black) of the pattern on the top contrasts with the colour (grey) of the under layer. This results in an organic confusing visual effect by colour contrasts. The technique used for binding these two layers is a combination of quilting and pleating. The double-layer fabric was loosely bound with hand stitches and ironed with 1.5 cm pleats in every 4 cm gap. Zigzag or buttonhole stitches were applied to fixed and secure the 1.5 cm

pleats as well as to firmly bind two layers together. Subsequently, I cut off the edges of the pleats and unravelled the edges by washing the fabrics 5 times in the washing machine. The raw edges appear in an organic and chaotic pattern, as the raw edges of the holes on the top layers mixed and combined the ray edges of the pleats. Thus the durability was actualised by the zigzag stitches and the thickness created by the layering and pleating, at the same time, the complicatedness was demonstrated by the chaotic and hallucinatory patterns consisting of raw edges, colour contrast, pleats and stripes.

The base for the design of the shirt/ dress is a men's size 48 shirt pattern with a patch pocket. The draping technique for the shirt/ dress is different from the techniques applied for the denim jacket in look 2, although the results of both garments look similar. The methods of shifting clothing panels for creating a genderless and de-humanised shape is achieved here by attaching extra triangular pieces on the centre front line of both left and right side and cutting triangular pieces away from each side seams on the front pieces in parallel with the newly constructed placket line. This was followed by adding extra length on the front panels and constructing new hemlines perpendicular to the paralleled packets and side slits lines, so that each front panel would appear in a shifted rectangular shape. The shirt/ dress length was extended to calf level in order to convert the garment into a mediator of a shirt and a dress. Two metal snaps were used to fasten the shirt/ dress along with three hooks on the back of each placket. Sleeve cuffs are also closed with metal snaps.

The tracksuit trousers were made out of men's size 28 tracksuit trousers pattern with two zipped side pockets. A pair of tracksuit trousers or sweatpants is almost essential for both women and men in all age groups. The side seams and inside seams of the tracksuit trousers were also straightened to demonstrate a genderless mediator between trousers and culottes. The trousers are fastened by elastic band gathered on the waistband and two patch pockets were added on the back of the trousers to enhance functionality. The length of the tracksuit trousers is to the shoes level.





*Opposite: Figure 14. Look3 Prototypes*

*Upper: Figure 15 Long Shirt/ Dress Textile*



## 4.6 Look 4 the suit

Look 4 contains a suit including a jacket and a pair of trousers, a knitted jumper and the accessories. I designed and produced the materials of the whole look including the fabrics for the suit and the knits for the jumper. The fabrics for the suit were developed using similar techniques as the fabrics for the long shirt/ dress in look 3 from a pre-printed sofa cotton satin fabric ordered from a UK fabric supply and the knits were produced from 100% linen yarns on a JBO double bed hand-knitting machine.

The design of the materials for this look also aimed at creating a combination of chaotic and strong textures and surfaces as my method of incorporating the qualities of being genderless, universal and resistant into the textiles of my collection. Durability and thickness were realized on the fabrics for the suit by layering and quilting as well as chaos and complicatedness were accomplished by bleaching, dying, top-stitching, raw edges and colour contrast from the layering. 12 meters of pre-printed cotton satin were used to make the fabrics for the suit. The reason for choosing this very thick interior cotton satin as the base fabric is its quality of having very thick cotton yarns and long-floating satin structure, which are the key requirements for creating a messy, fluffy raw edge surface. The cotton satin fabrics were firstly dyed with 4% of Remazol black reactive dyes, Glauber's salt as electrolyte and Soda ash as alkali in 80 degree temperature water. These fabrics were dyed evenly in a washing machine followed by the next step of uneven bleaching. The bleaching technique creates watering or flame-like visual pattern, because the dissemination of the bleach is uneven in the water. The black shade was transformed into violet grey, which is the undertone of the reactive dye. I cut the fabrics into two pieces and bleached them for eight hours in two containers with different ratio of the water and bleach. The darker piece of the fabric with the bleach/ water ratio of 1:300 remained mostly black with small area of violet grey and the lighter piece with the bleach/ water ratio of 1:30 turned out to be mostly violet grey with parts appearing light violet colour. These two bleach/ water ratios were chosen out of 10 options of the sampling and testing stage to be the best combination for creating colour contrasts of the two pieces prepared for layering. Holes with raw edges were then cut on the darker pieces

of the fabrics as the top layer, thus the pattern of the lighter pieces would be revealed from these holes. I hand stitched these two layers of fabrics together similarly to the techniques used in the long shirt/ dress of look 3 and then quilted these two layers together with thick white threads between every 4 cm gap. The hand stitches were removed later, because the function of the hand stitches was to make the structure stable enough for the quilting process. The last process was to wash the bound fabrics in washing machine for 5 times to make the raw edges unravel. This fabric was designed as my interpretation of the stripe fabrics commonly seen in punk subculture with my method of a genderless twist.

The suit jacket originated from a men's size 48 classic suit jacket pattern with two side pockets and a single welt pocket on the right chest area. The same method of shifting clothing panels symmetrically as the denim jacket in look 2 was applied to twist the suit jacket into a genderless and de-humanised shape, but the centre point for rotating the front clothing panels in this garment was the intersection point of centre front line and chest line. The draping solution for achieving this rotation was to cut open the princess lines and inserts extra triangular pieces in order to tilt the folding line of the lapels and collar. This also resulted in an essential triangular piece to be added on the centre back of the collar. A triangular shape was then cut on the side seam area of the right front panel together with a verticalized hemline to make the right front panel rectangular. The fitted shape of the classic suit jacket was transformed into a boxy shape after these alterations and the masculine shape of the human body enhanced by the classic suit jacket was correspondingly converted into a cube shape support structure for the independent shape of the garment. The side pockets and front darts of the classic suit jacket pattern were removed, because their function of imitating an ideal male body shape was eliminated by the rotation of clothing panels. The welt pocket was made horizontally and unchanged for the functionality of its use. The redesigned suit jacket is fastened by hooks on the facing of the lapels and the chest padding structure was made with the classic men's suit jacket tailoring techniques.

The suit trousers in look 4 and look 2 were made with the exact same pattern. The de-gendering and de-humanising process of this pattern were introduced in the Look 2 section. The length of this pair of suit trousers was altered to the floor.



*Figure 16 . Suit Jacket Prototype*

*Figure 17 . Knitted Sweater Prototype*

*Figure 18 . Suit Trousers Prototype*



The knitted jumper was developed from a men's size 42 tight-fitted jumper pattern. The rotation of this piece was actualised by cutting open the right side seam from the hemline to the sleeve and gathering the hem. The gathered hem forced the front panel to shift towards the left side and left a triangular slit on the place of the original right side seam. This jumper was knitted with single-layer ladder structure on a 4 gauge JBO machine. The ladder structure was created by knitting without using the needles of the ladder area. The knitted fabrics were later dyed in black with reactive dyes and bleached by hand. The hand knitted fabric consisted of the front and back panel of the jumper, and the turtleneck and sleeves were made out of 2/2 rib knits bought from local fabric supply. I applied interfacing tapes on the seams of the knits to make it possible to use sewing machine for assembling the jumper.

## 4.7 Look 5 the T shirt and skirt

Look 5 consists of a T- shirt, a skirt/ kilt, a pair of trainers and a balaclava hood. The material of the T – shirt was woven with approximately 5000 safety pins. The length of the safety pins is 38mm. This safety pins structure is my third interpretation of the plaids pattern used in punk subculture, following the pattern of the jacquard fabrics and the fabrics of the long shirt/ dress in look 3. A basic structure of the safety pins is constructed by firstly putting the horizontal pin into the holes of the springs of 10 other vertically placed safety pins. Two of these basic structures are connected by the two horizontal pins sharing either the first and the last vertical pins or the 8 safety pins in the middle of the pins group whose holes of the springs were pinned through by the horizontal pins. Therefore, a square shape is formed by either the two horizontal pins connecting the two shared pins from the vertical pins group or the paralleled 8 safety pins group. This woven structure also presents durability and complicatedness in the texture and surfaces which works as visual signifiers of genderless quality in my collection.

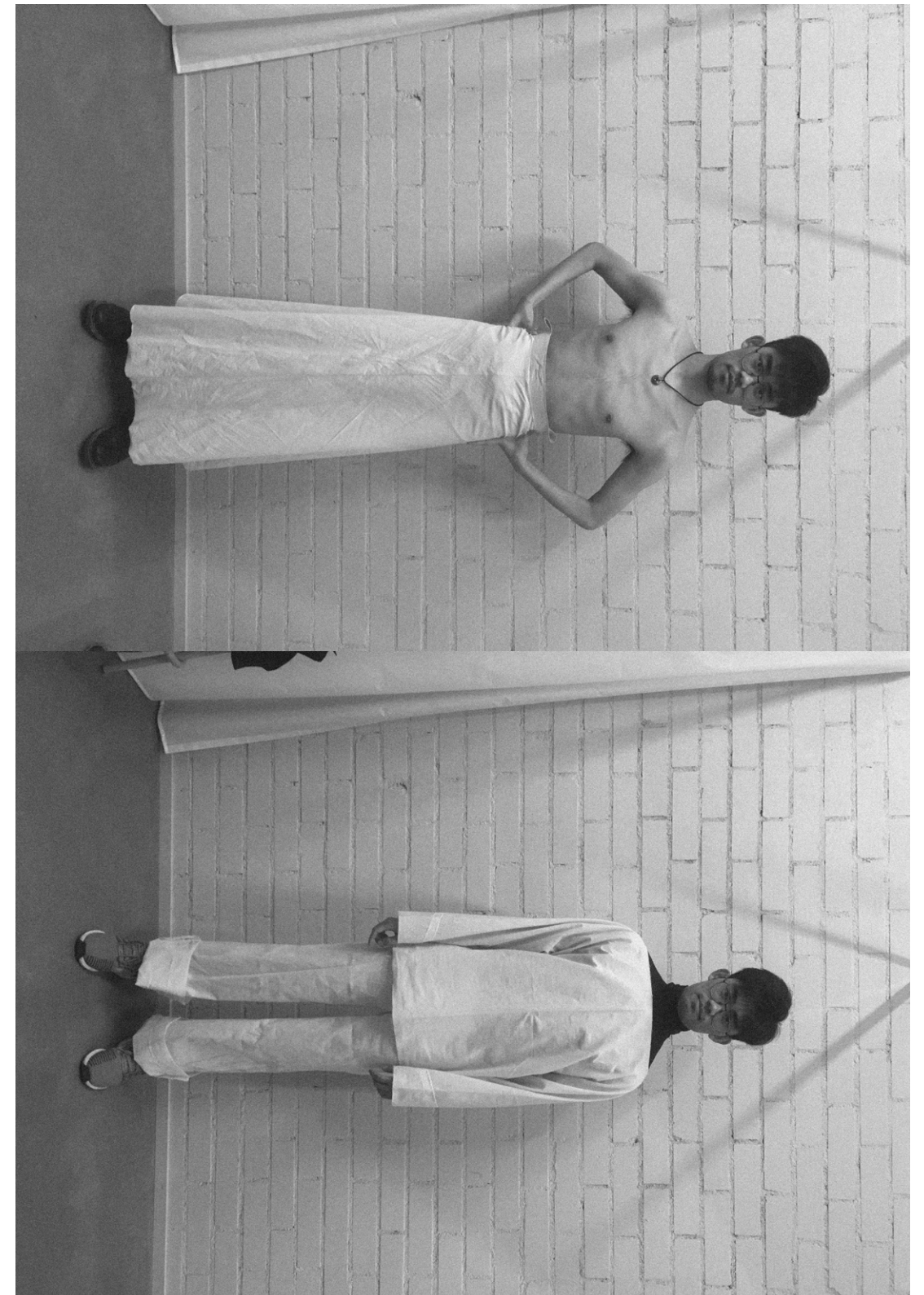
The T- shirt pattern was developed from a men's size 46 loose-fitted T- shirt pattern with short sleeves. The reason of choosing this pattern is the quality of being universal and genderless attached to the wearing of a T – shirt. The short sleeves of the original T – shirt pattern was removed due to technical difficulties of assembling sleeves with a metal structure textile. The round neck line was altered into a wide straight neckline due to the same cause. The length of the T- shirt was made to the hip height.

I aim to lead people into thinking about the question – is clothing tradition constructed by the demand of biological sex or cultural gender, by bring a skirt/ kilt into my collection. It is undoubted that the shapes of an A-line skirt and a kilt are almost identical. That is, the functions of as A-line skirt and a kilt are correspondingly identical, because the visual patterns of the textiles could not change the physical relationship between the body and the garments. Therefore, the fact that skirts are used by women and kilts are used by men is an evidence of the differentiation of the use of garments serving the construction of gender identities in the culture rather than the needs of biological sexual differences. This skirt/kilt was developed from a

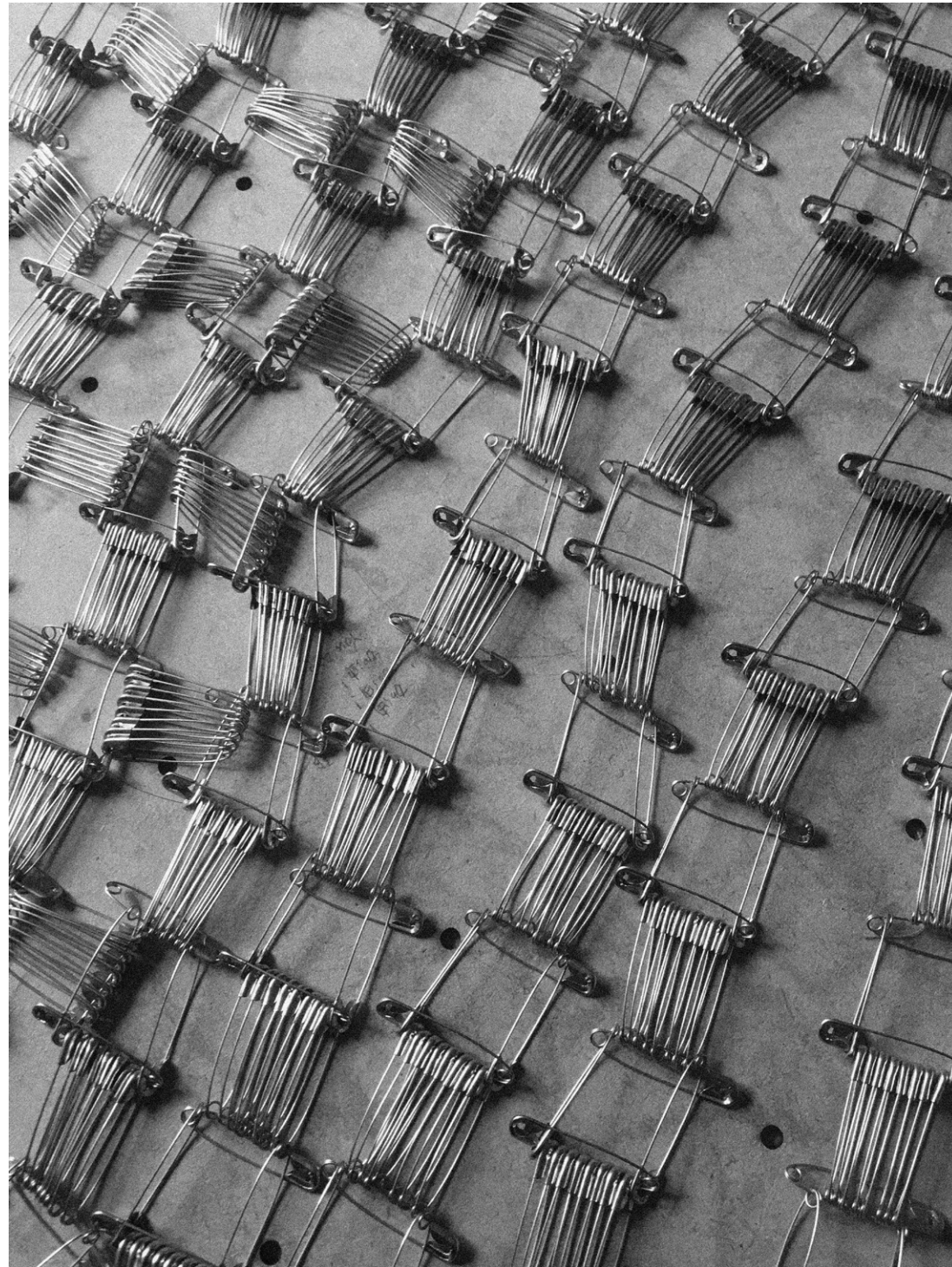


basic A-line skirt pattern with the waistline of 68 cm. The waistband was lengthened into 74 cm and a 60 cm elastic band was attached inside of the waistband similarly to the design of the waistband of the tracksuit trousers. This alteration resulted in a straighter shape from the waist to the hip and an enhanced comfort of the waistband. A zipped side pocket was added as well to raise functionality and imitate the design with a pair of tracksuit trousers, which is considered to be a genderless garment for the bottom of the body. The skirt length was decided to the shoe height.

The material used by the skirt is a double-layer quilted fabric made from heavy cotton denim (top layer) and viscose satin (under layer). The design of this fabric was inspired by the stripe fabric of the punk style. The contrast of the rough surface of the denim with the silky shines of the viscose satin presents a chaotic surface implying a paradox of undetermined characteristics of gender. These two base fabrics were order from the UK. The denim fabric for the top layer was hand painted with reactive dye into red colour and the satin for the bottom layer was made into pink colour. The hand painting technique of these two fabrics was to splash different shades of the dyes onto the fabrics. This technique created dotted and splashed patterns for the two layers. Holes with raw edges were later cut on the denim piece similarly to the other two double – layer fabrics used in look 3 and look 4, thus the pink pattern of the satin could be visible. These two layers were hand stitched and later bound with quilting stitches between every 4 cm gap. The denim layer was then cut in the middle of and in parallel with the quilting stitch lines to increase the richness and appearance of the raw edges. The last stage of the process was to unravel the raw edges with 5 washes.



*Figure 19 . Look 5 Prototypes*



*Figure 20 . Look 5 T-shirt Textile*

## 4.8 Look 6 the Mac coat and the jeans

The components of look 6 are a Mac coat, a pair of jeans, trainers and a balaclava hood. The materials of this look are digitally printed cotton denim with the black and white graphic print inspired by Ren Hang's poems. This all-over print was designed by using the visual elements from my 6 illustrations inspired by the stories of Ren Hang's poems. The method addressing the genderless message in the print was elaborated in the section of Inspiration – Ren Hang. All the elements of the illustrations were placed in a manner that ensures the readability of the stories of the poems and removes any signs of the visibility of a seam in the repeat. Four fabrics were digitally printed with the same print pattern but different scales of the repeat. The scales of the repeats from the smallest to the biggest are 55/ 65 cm (W/ H), 110/ 130 cm (W/ H), 165/ 196 cm (W/ H) and 220/ 262 cm (W/ H). The fabric with either the smallest or the biggest scales of the repeat was used to make left or right side of the jeans and create a graphical contrast effect. The Mac coat was made out of the fabrics with two medium scales of the repeat, specifically, the 110/ 130 cm (W/ H) one for the front side of the Mac coat and the 165/ 196 cm (W/ H) for the back side.

The Mac coat was designed with the base pattern of a men's size 56 Mac coat pattern with a 7 cm wide convertible collar and two welt pockets on left and right side panels. I modified the width of the collar into 12 cm and drop the starting point of the lapel folding line from the underarm height to the waistline level. At the same time, the original two single welt pockets were also converted into two patch pockets, which are recognised as the signs of differentiating a blazer from a suit. The sleeves patterns were reconstructed as two- piece sleeves in a style commonly seen in a denim jacket or work wear clothing. All the clothing panels of the Mac coat were assembled with flat felled seams and top stitching similarly to jeans and work wear. Additionally, lining of the coat is also abandoned in this design due to the fact that lining is not necessary when seam allowances were finished nicely and hidden by the flat felled seams and lining would cover the body from the holes effect on the surface of the textiles. These adjustments were targeted to enhance the casualness and universality of the design and simultaneously diminish the implication of masculinity attached to

the restricted formal style of a Mac coat. Numerous holes were cut at the later stage of the Mac coat design to create a durable and complicated surfaces and textures in combination with the Ren Hang print. These holes also reveal fragmented parts of the human body that cannot be used to speculate any characteristics of gender or sex of the wearer's body. This is to imply an undetermined and fragmented gender identity and personal identity.

The jeans were developed from men's size 28 jeans pattern with two side packets, two back patch pockets, yoke structures and a zipped fly. A small ease of 4 cm was added to the hip circumference of the jeans with a relatively big ease of 2 cm added to the waistline. Meanwhile, the knee line of the jeans was decide to be 6 cm higher than the natural knee height of human body with 1 cm inward comparing to the hemline. These two approaches generated a straightened shape which geometrised and de- humanised the shape of the wear's the legs.



*Figure 21 . Mac Coat Prototypes*

## Conclusion

Clothing and fashion are in inseparable and symbiotic connection with a person's identity, whether as the indicatives and constructive medias of class, gender, race or ethnics. Although decades of people has been attempting to contribute to a more democratic society by offering new fashion and clothing implying a more equal recognition to each one of these identities, such as punk, the wearing of trousers for women and etc, the evidences of the unequal connotations attached to fashion and clothing prove that the topic of influencing the society with fashion and clothing is still significantly relevant today, if not more inasmuch as the ubiquity of social media and commercials has made fashion more powerful and popular than ever. The inequality issues in a globalised world today become more complicated, since they are involved more with aspects including gender, race, ethnics, sexual orientation and etc rather than merely the class. One reflection of this in fashion industry is the application of the binary logic of gender in producing and using fashion and clothing, as the construction of such logic was originated under the context of patriarchal hegemony and thus perpetuates gender inequality. The contradictions also lie between the contemporary personal identities, which are malleable and not binary, and the current fashion or clothing under the binary system of gender, which forges and reflects the personal identities. This results in oppression and inequality to people whether seen as the paradigms or the outsiders of the binary system of gender. The existence of binary gendered system in fashion also implies the inefficiency of the gender border crossings in the recent decades, as the dominance of male principles are operating in these attempts. Therefore, a possible new alternative of this issue is fashion in denial rather than in mixture of gender.

My thesis aims to tackle the inequality of gender constructed and reflected by the binary logic of gender in current fashion industry by offering a critical fashion practice in the field of genderless fashion, which in my belief is an alternative outside the binary system. The methods to approach the genderless quality in my design practice are to de-gender the gendered visual signifiers by distortion and deconstruction in a selection of "unisex" clothing items. The distortion and deconstruction of visual signifiers of gender was conducted in two aspects - the

garment construction and the textile design. The outcome of the thesis is a fashion collection of 6 outfits/ 20 garments assembled from my interpretation of genderless garments construction and genderless textiles. This thesis is an experiment of design activism in fashion dealing with gender inequality and it provides me with findings including knowledge of critical fashion, relationship between fashion and gender and my own fashion manifesto.







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